

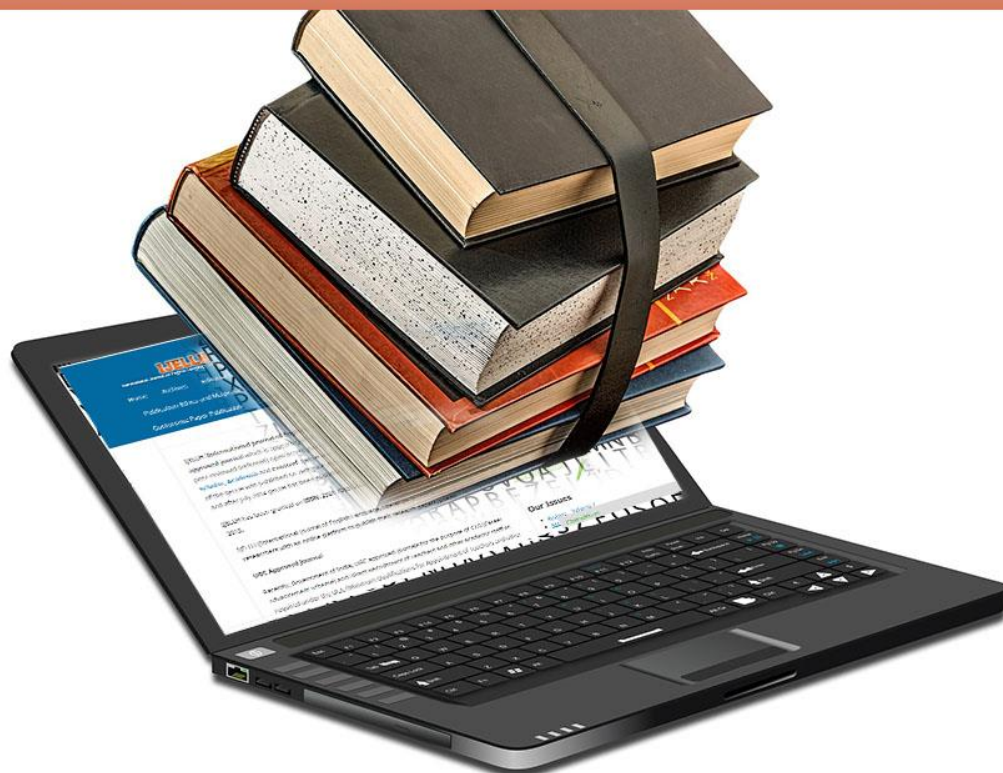
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Staging the Stag Hunt: Visual and Verbal Artifice in Thomas Wyatt's 'Whoso List to Hunt'

Artifice is usually associated with deception, secrecy, embellishments and textuality, while art is often about genius, nature, veracity, and certitude. The idea of art being natural and artifice being constructed governs much of what we write about, much of what we take theoretical time to debate. But both are essentially aesthetic constructs and are complex, historical and conspicuously material processes.

Art is constructed and not conjured, created and not discovered. A work of art is an artifact of expressive, historically contingent understanding, which is not merely a mimetic enterprise. It never comes naturally and innocently without artifice. Artifice is ubiquitous in all dimensions of art. Art is definitely artificial, emerging from the conscious activity of individuals, the very base of everything arbitrary, perspectival and paradigmatic. In the event, however, the dimension of art by which it can also be regarded as an artifact is ideally suited for metaphysical apprehension. To be an artifact means also being the product of a craft, of an intentional or purposive act of labour.

Artifice invariably suggests the notion of in-betweenness. Beneath the show of the apparent, of surfaces and the artistic, the artifice manages to introduce the idea of in-betweenness, thereby challenging readers to rethink the existing conceptual apparatus. The in-betweenness allows establishing, legitimizing, or rejecting discourses while being simultaneously indifferent to the value content of decision-making or stance-taking. It confronts the ambivalence and fragility of the existing semiotic orders, albeit in an artful manner, as nothing more than an intellectual and aesthetic exercise. In the process, it creates a unique, substantive perspective that helps to shape the conceptual framework of the literature of a period.

Studying Renaissance artifice as an interface can help to make visible forces within the texts and within the period at large which were designed to remain invisible to their readers. Elements of artifice can be used to gain a greater understanding of the Renaissance as an historical, cultural, and ideological force. Artifice in early modern European texts is not merely an intellectual proclivity for design and stylization based on the self-interest and craft of the individual writer. It is, in fact, also a disguised evaluative dimension challenging, resisting and reckoning the established power configuration. This is very much in congruence with the complexities of the age of cynicism and theoretical uncertainty.

The word artifice is directly descended from the Latin word *artificium*¹, which means the occupation of an *artifex*², a profession, trade, an employment, a handicraft, an art, and in a bad sense, craft and cunning. Throughout its semantic history, the meaning, interpretation and

¹The word artifice comes to English through Middle French *artifice*, which in turn was derived from Old French *artefice*. The French words meant work of art, craftsmanship, human skill as opposed to nature, engine, and contrivance. Both the French words are derived from the Latin *artificium*, which signified the occupation of an *artifex* (the corresponding noun form), a profession, trade, an employment, an art, craft and cunning. The Latin word *artificium* is a derivative of the stem, *ars*, meaning "art" and also *facere*, meaning "to make, do". The word *facere* is cognate with Latin *facticius/factitious*, which means "artificial" and *factus*, which means "elaborate, artistic" ("Artifice")

²See Footnote 1

functions of the word varied considerably and in different periods, different aspects were emphasized. But there are some trends that may conveniently be isolated, as well as significations and features that need to be explored. The meaning shifts from an artisan, a craftsman, based on artistry and ingenuity to that which means human skill or human workmanship, distinct from what is natural or natural phenomenon, and finally to mean a clever stratagem (chiefly in a negative sense), a manoeuvre or device intended to deceive or trick. The meaning evolves from its point of entry in the socio-economic realm to progress further and advance into a sphere of mystery, enigma and evanescence.

It is possible to narrow down progressively two essential features of the word 'artifice' which remain predominant throughout its semantic development, namely the idea of knowledge or a learned skill, and a concomitant notion of being a craft which is purposive and strategic. The significations are notable because both foreground the fact that the idea of an artifice has always underpinned the notion of art as essentially an act of labour and industry.

It is evident that the idea of what constitutes an artifice is somewhat slippery and it resists rigid definition. It consists of a whole enigmatic dimension of connotations— enlightening, misleading, bewitching, disconcerting, unsettling, concealing and dangerous – that makes the idea of an artifice so appealing. It is limiting to conceptualize it to one singular type or aspect among its varied range of meanings. Rather than insisting on a singular interpretation, the kind of reading that serves to smooth over the ambiguity of the concept, I wish to circumvent and emphasize the range of different meanings ascribed to the term.

The idea of artifice is indeed so fundamental that the meditations on the concept and its various implications have permeated discourses on art, philosophy, literature across ages. The analysis of specific moments in the history of the concept permits a bracketing off of several interpretations

and their transformations. The transformations occur in a mysterious form and it defines a moment of continuity and discontinuity in the evolution of the meaning of the word.

Discontinuity happens in the altering of a hitherto enduring sense and substituting it with another sense. Continuity implies the partial endurance of the discarded initial sense in such a way that the meaning is made more ambivalent. Plato conceptualizes a god who is competent and rational and who is described essentially as a craftsman, and indeed who is typically referred to simply as the *Demiurge*. Plato calls attention to *Demiurge*'s technical virtuosity and artistry when he says, "of all the things that have come to be, our universe is the most beautiful, and of causes the craftsman is the most excellent. This, then, is how it has come to be: it is a work of craft, modeled after that which is changeless and is grasped by a rational account, that is, by wisdom" (Timaeus 29a).

The seventeenth century Platonist reformers selectively appropriated the Platonic simile of the Artist/ Creator God, grafting on to it the Judeo-Christian details of the superiority. This is recognizably the meaning which the Platonist and spiritual reformer John Smith has appropriated in his *Selected Discourses*, where he describes "God himself as the Architect and mover of this Divine Artifice" (48; ch. 3). Another famous Platonist reformer belonging to the same period, Ralph Cudworth ventures to describe the universe as an "Artifice of God, the Artifice of the best Mechanist" (175; vol. 2; ch.4). This can be easily presumed as a direct reference to the Platonic notion of *Demiurge* or the craftsman God. In this metaphysical tradition the association is made between the Creator and a master craftsman. Even at the end of eighteenth century the association relives in Wordsworth's envisioning of the Creative spirit as "the great Artificer endued / With no inferior power" (164). However, an artificer was also regarded as a lowly and inferior figure, an image associated with the perceived undesirability of the practice of artifice,

and it is undoubtedly this aspect of his persona which led Milton to describe him as the “the meanest artificer” (878). Milton also emphatically proclaims his resolve to refrain from adopting the “The skill of Artifice or Office mean” (323) indicating a sense of superiority to the writing devoid of artifice. In many ways, Milton’s Satan serves as a model for the figure of an artificer as a trickster, a deviser, inventor, or framer. Satan is famously identified as the “Artificer of fraud; and was the first / That practis’d falsehood under saintly show” (280). It is indeed interesting that both the positive and negative connotations of the word have persisted for so long. The idea of an artificer as a skilled craftsman is revived when Stephen Daedalus invokes the classical Daedalus as “Old father, old artificer” (225) in the closing lines of Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

It is also important to look in a more integral way the implication of the various interpretations of the literary artifice, both at a given historical moment and across periods. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were rife with debates over literary artifice. On the one hand, artifice was rigorously denounced over moral and aesthetic grounds; specifically, censured as unnatural, contrived and morally pernicious; while, on the other hand, it was praised for its craft, intelligence and aesthetic ingenuity of ornamentation. Philip Sidney in his *Defence of Poesy*, uses the word ‘artificer’ as directly synonymous with Poet. While underscoring the *Defence* as a vindication, solely of poetry and not of poets, Sidney writes, “yet say I and say again, I speak of the art, and not of the artificer” (93). Sidney sees artifice as a source poetic strength. Sidney asserts that all arts, except for poetry, depend on nature for its “principal object” However the poet,

lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow, in effect, into another nature, in making things either better than Nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as

never were in Nature, as the Heroes, Demi-gods, Cyclops, Chimeras, Furies, and such like: so as he goeth hand in hand with Nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging within the zodiac of his own wit.

Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done; neither with pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet-smelling flowers, nor whatsoever else may make the too much loved earth more lovely. Her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden. (85)

It is noteworthy that Sidney regards the artifice of the poet's "golden world" as its main virtue and strength.

Through seventeenth and eighteenth century, the repertoire of this discourse expanded when the neo-classicist belief in artifice clashed with the Romantic privileging of natural form. However, some poets, particularly Gerald Manley Hopkins diverged from the Wordsworthian preference for simplicity and naturalness in poetic language and extolled the artifice inherent in the parallelistic stylization in poetry:

The artificial part of poetry, perhaps we shall be right to say all artifice, reduces itself to the principle of parallelism. The structure of poetry is that of continuous parallelism, ranging from the technical so-called Parallelisms of Hebrew poetry and the antiphons of Church music up to the intricacy of Greek or Italian or English verse. But parallelism is of two kinds necessarily where the opposition is clearly marked, and where it is transitional rather or chromatic. Only the first kind, that of marked parallelism, is concerned with the structure of verse - in rhythm, the recurrence of a certain sequence of syllables, in metre, the recurrence of a certain sequence of rhythm, in alliteration, in assonance and in rhyme. Now the force of this recurrence is to beget a recurrence or

parallelism answering to it in the words or thought and, speaking roughly and rather for the tendency than the invariable result, the more marked parallelism in structure whether of elaboration or of emphasis begets more marked parallelism in the words and sense.

(qtd. in Lodge and Wood 155)

There was a renewed focus on poetic artifice as a result of the twentieth century's emphasis on formalist poetics. The New Critic, W.K. Wimsatt distinguishes between rhetoric and poetry based on the level of explicitness of artifice. He writes,

It is something like a definition of poetry to say that whereas rhetoric—in the sense of mere persuasion or sophistic—is a kind of discourse the power of which diminishes in proportion as the artifice of it is understood or seen through—poetry, on the other hand, is a kind of discourse the power of which—or the satisfaction of which we derive from it—is actually increased by an increase in our understanding of the artifice. *In poetry the artifice is art* [emphasis added]. (240-41)

Veronica Forrest Thomson's seminal work *Poetic Artifice* remains one of the most definitive studies on literary artifice. Thomson focuses on the broader, more nebulous problem of how to read the poetic artifice without resorting to "naturalization" of the poetic language. Thomson writes that "If prose often resembles the 'natural' language of ordinary speech, poetry is resolutely artificial, even when it tries to imitate the diction and cadences of ordinary speech" (ix).

Charles Bernstein in 'Artifice of Absorption', a verse critique on Thomson's work, describes artifice as "a measure of a poem's / intractability to being read as the sum of its / devices & subject matters. In this sense, / 'artifice' is the contradiction of 'realism', with / its insistence on

presenting an unmediated / (immediate) experience of facts, either of the / “external” world of nature or the “internal” world / of the mind;” (9)

Bernstein delineates artifice in terms of absorption and impermeability of the poetic text. He writes,

By absorption I mean engrossing, engulfing
completely, engaging, arresting attention, reverie,
attention intensification, rhapsodic, spellbinding,
mesmerizing, hypnotic, total, riveting,
enthraling: belief, conviction, silence.

Impermeability suggests artifice, boredom,
exaggeration, attention scattering, distraction,
digression, interruptive, transgressive,
undecorous, anticonventional, unintegrated, fractured,
fragmented, fanciful, ornately stylized, rococo,
baroque, structural, mannered, fanciful, ironic,
iconic, schtick, camp, diffuse, decorative,
repellent, inchoate, programmatic, didactic,
theatrical, background muzak, amusing: skepticism,
doubt, noise, resistance.

Absorptive & antiabsorptive

works both require artifice. (29-30)

My aim in this paper is not to provide a singular interpretation of what an artifice mean. The proposed study does not advocate recognition as the ‘definitive’ or ‘best’ way to interpret the

artifice. This cannot be underscored enough. Rather, it introduces an artifice as a heuristic, a reading aid that would facilitate the exploration of the incongruity of the images and meanings in Renaissance texts. Furthermore, my interest in artifice as an aesthetic device is not an end in and of itself. Studying and understanding artifice has implications for issues of labour and its attendant labour politics of an era. As a matter of fact, it is my contention that aesthetic perception is always clad in a halo of vital socioeconomic preoccupations and that in this way both share a similar role in formulating the complexity of artifice.

Thomas Wyatt, together with Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey, were pioneers of the sonnet form in England. Wyatt and Surrey along with other Tudor poets ushered in the early Renaissance to the English soil and lead the way towards the great flowering of English poetry during the Elizabethan age. Wyatt's 'Whoso List to Hunt' is one of the most prominent sonnets in the volume of poems published together in 1557 as *Songs and Sonnets*, popularly known as Tottel's Miscellany. In this section, I aim to identify and interpret the underlying artifice in the poem. The sonnet Whoso List to Hunt, primarily depends upon an active visualization on the part of the reader. The meaning is thus inferred through intermediary images: the Hind, the forest, the hunting retinue, etc. Unlike Petrarch, in Wyatt we find a more material kind of figuration and visual poetics, whose significance become apparent when we associate it with the emblem books of sixteenth-century Europe. Wyatt's figural complexity, an essential part of his artifice, deserves careful scrutiny, not only for the added dimensions it brings to his poems, but also for the evidence it provides of a unity of conception which is able to assimilate so many diverse units, so many seemingly disparate contents, and weld them into a coherent whole. Wyatt's images often have the multi-dimensional quality of these early illuminations; his

metaphors repeatedly seem designed to embody the symbolic richness, ambiguity and complexity of these illuminations.

“In its original form, Renaissance emblem is a literary device found in educational and didactic poetry and defined by a tripartite typographical arrangement of text and picture. In time, the emblem book evolved from being simply a specialized form of learned epigrammatic poetry into a particular type of book targeted at a wide variety of readers” (Knapp and Tuskes 8). Bradley. J. Neson succinctly defines an emblem as “a discursive form that requires a visual image as well as formidable technological apparatus and social habitus in its production ”(7). The emblem books became popular throughout Western Europe in the 16th and 17th century and they revealed, “a complete panoply of renaissance interests and experience. There are military, amorous, and religious emblem-books; collections that are moral, political, and didactic (imparting information on any and every subject); emblem-books that are entertaining and simply decorative” (Daly 4). The early Renaissance world of emblems is entirely a world of visual symbols and analogies. The analogies may hint at a reality but they are essentially designed to function as artifacts. Wyatt’s extreme stylization of objects and nature, his penchant for treating abstract ideas as if they were concrete symbols, are sure marks of artifice akin to an emblematisit.

Wyatt’s sonnet has a host of attributes that closely ally it with the prevailing rules of emblem literature of fifteenth and sixteenth century deriving from Andrea Alciato's *Emblematum liber*. Emblem books were one of the few pictorial representations the Protestant aesthetics approved wholeheartedly. The emblems were visually and symbolically committed to the intricate abstractions of the Protestant theology, but they also possessed an intense, even mystical nature which was somewhat of a provocation, carrying as it does associations with the Catholic

iconography and Paganism. However it more often managed to deftly go past the narrow confines of the reformist dogma. Wyatt may have had this particular visual tradition in mind while writing the poem.

The emblems functioned by suggesting the likeness of the poetic image with a real object or thought. The likeness however is never mimetic. It is equated, not identified, with the object. The emblem resembles a poem as it is also characterized by a patterned arrangement of symbolic details and wherein there is a possibility of only a very arbitrary relation between the symbolic and the symbolized. The ornamental and pictorial aspects of these works taken in conjunction with their intellectual and esoteric appeal lend them well to adaptation into literature by the writers of renaissance. Henry Green lists more than four hundred of Shakespeare's references to emblematic material. Wyatt and the poets of his time might have been definitely acquainted with emblem literature.

Wyatt's sonnet, in true *ut picture poesis* fashion, functions as an artifact. The focal point of the poem is the image of the hind, the center around which the sonnet unfolds. The hind, the chase, along with the atmosphere and the narrator form the visual dimension of the poem. Wyatt with the dexterity of a skilled emblemist imparts the precise amount of glosses for the Hind. The concluding lines together with the visuals betray a close affinity with the emblem in their very structure, since an emblem usually comprised of a pictorial device and an accompanying motto. Daly describes in detail what came to be known as the tripartite structure of the emblem:

the emblem is composed of three parts, for which the Latin names seem most useful: *inscriptio*, *pictura*, and *subscriptio*. A short motto or quotation introduces the emblem. It is usually printed above the *pictura*, and it functions as the *inscriptio*. The *pictura* itself may depict one or several objects, persons, events, or action, in some instances set against

an imaginary or real background Some of the objects are real (i.e., found in world of man or nature), while others are imaginary, which does not imply that during the seventeenth century they were necessarily considered fictitious Beneath the *pictura* comes a prose or verse quotation from some learned source or from the emblematicist himself, which functions as a *subscriptio*. (7)

We have in the sonnet a pictorial image strikingly similar to the *pictura* of an emblem, an image of the hind, vivid and splendid with a collar around its neck embellished with diamonds and engraved with the words, “ ‘Noli me tangere ; for Cæsar's I am, / And wild for to hold, though I seem tame’ ” (Wyatt 21). The Latin phrase, “Noli me tangere” with its biblical and historical overtones serves the additional function of signifying something outside of itself, thus creating an extra-literal dimension, and in the process, assuming the character and function similar to the *inscriptio* in an emblem. The rest of the sonnet serves to augment the enigma implicit in the image of the hind and the cryptic nature of the concluding couplet, akin to the role of a *subscriptio*. The sonnet’s semblance to an artifact is all too apparent, not just in structure but also in being itself the product of self-conscious artistry, wherein the element of craft is particularly dominant. Hence, to stress Wyatt’s awareness of emblem literature, we may add that he conforms to the central specifications of emblematic texts. These include the prerequisite that, in addition to being brief, the motto be in a different language from the text; that the figure should not be contained therein; and that, above all, there should be an element of rarity and wonder. There is an apparent solidity to Wyatt’s imagery perceptible in his incessant particularization of details. This specificity reveals his desire to construct an intricate series of allegorical correspondence around a single image. The same careful crafting of the figural dimension is evident in emblem books where the artist neatly lays down the idea behind particular sections of

the image. The emblematisers usually presented his complex ideas using intricate, highly detailed emblematic constructs. It is typical of Wyatt's method that what at first might appear to be a succinct poetic image, acting as an embellishment (similar to the visual embellishment of an engraved emblem) expands in levels of meaning and significance as the poem unfolds and as the reader becomes more readily acquainted with the various contexts within which the image can operate. I will try to explicate it by studying the use of the word 'graven' in the description of the collar around the hind's neck, "And graven with diamonds in letters plain, / There is written her fair neck round about" (Wyatt 21) If, in the creation of the hind's image, Wyatt is merely adhering to the Petrarchan aesthetics, then it becomes difficult to account for the word 'graven', certainly an unexpected word to associate with the traditional Petrarchan motif of a Hind-lover³. The word 'graven', whose meaning extends from the carving/sculpting motif, is associated with a larger sphere of making, creating, and crafting. Wyatt substitutes the word 'graven' for 'written' (*scritto*) in the Petrarchan source poem⁴, foregrounding the inherent difference between the two verbs, one belonging to the world of art and other to the craft. Also, the word 'graven' is imbued with the senses of cutting, marking, notching etc., Moreover, engraving is a craft which

³The hind is an important and recurrent motif in medieval ballads and later it got adopted into lyric poems. The lover-hind motif abounds in Petrarchan lyric poems, wherein the terminology of hunting is used to describe the pursuit of the lover. Wyatt divests from the usual portrait of a sentimental Petrarchan poet who is often utterly baffled by the ephemeral beauty of the hind in poems. Wyatt is never very serious in his professed longing for the hind, and in fact, adopts the highly stylized perspective of a Petrarchan lover chiefly as an artifice. The Hind-lover motif should be considered an outgrowth of a literary convention which was already long established and widespread. However, the level of corroboration of the motif with real-life would be slight. For instance, the picture of the Hind in Petrarch's Sonnet suggests ethereality, grace, purity, artlessness, beauty, magic and timidity, all qualities which are imaginary or ideal.

⁴ The stanza from Petrarch's Rime 190 translated by Anna Maria Armi,
 Nessun mi tóccchi--al bel collo d'intorno
 Scritto avea di diamanti e di topazi--
 Libera farmi al mio Cesare parve.

Around her lovely neck, "Do not touch me"
 Was written with topaz and diamond stone,
 "My Caesar's will has been to make me free. (qtd in. Miller 23)

manipulates surfaces and indent a human plan on nature. Hence, a closer look at this particular act of substitution by the poet can reveal a desire to insinuate the inherent severity associated with the act of engraving (as opposed to the presumed fineness and delicacy of the act of writing). Once the ephemeral hind belonged to the sylvan pristine landscape of the Petrarchan love lyric, but now the hind cannot be disentangled from its tangible, material reality. Hence the idyllic and sylvan Petrarchan aesthetics is unmasked to reveal the actual world of Henrican England where art is inextricably bound up with the awareness of its materiality and its crafted nature.

It is part of the poet's artifice to take the image of the hind beyond its local function, and the word 'graven' becomes strikingly appropriate once we are aware of the historical context within which the image operates. To see this even more clearly, we might return to another possible association, this time focusing our attention on a conspicuous graven image, which in many ways, epitomizes the artifice in Renaissance Europe – the imposing image of Henry VIII graven in the woodcut title page of Coverdale Bible in 1535, designed by Hans Holbein. The image carefully designed and engraved is regarded, “as a landmark in the dissemination of visual propaganda in England; the effects of which came to be far more widespread than any image of Henry VIII.” (Haworth 221) The intricately carved image depicts:

an ideal evangelical kingship in terms of the transition from the law of Moses to that of Christ . The figure of Adam and Eve at the top left prefigure Christ's resurrection at the opposite side. Henry VIII wields the sword and the book as a worldly instrument of divine revelation at the bottom. His authority is transmitted to him symbolically from the heavens above via the Old and New Testament models for sacred kingship depicted elsewhere on the page. The composite

biblical symbol of the sword and the book would play a vital role in a campaign to establish Henry VIII's image as a theocratic ruler capable of unifying ecclesiastical and secular authority. The figures of David and Paul who flank Henry VIII respectively symbolize divine revelation Whereas the lyre bearing figure of David serves primarily as a type for Henry VIII's claim to govern by divine sanction, St. Paul's presence denies the papal claim to primacy as an inheritance from St. Peter. (King 79)

The element of craft and intent is particularly dominant in the visual propaganda, which narrowed down the space between representation and interpretation.⁵ The analysis may have switched from one image to another, but the two are firmly linked, for just as the words graven on the hind's collar "for Cæsar's I am" suggests protective containment, so does the engraved image of Henry on the Bible prefigure protecting the Church by containing and controlling. The Hind's collar also conveys that it is only seemingly tame, "wild for to hold, though I seem tame"(Wyatt . Thus the inherent, natural timidity of the Hind/Church get subsumed by an artifice that in turn imposes on it a spurious fierceness, to put across the severity and supremacy of its overlord.

Thus early modern Tudor poetry, like the contemporary emblematic art was no longer just written for literary entertainment, it became a self-conscious art form which testified to the theoretical merging of the boundaries of the artist, artifice and intent. We can discern a shift

⁵ The artifice is evident in the:

"inversion of the conventional 'movement' of the dedication portrait, in which a patron characteristically receives a presentation copy of a manuscript or book from its author or translator. Henry VIII's posture in the Great Bible woodcut therefore combines that of both artist and patron as he assumes the quasi-authorial role of transforming Verbum dei ('the Word of God') to the flanking figures . . . (Hoak 108)

here, a shift which epitomizes the general transition from the relatively direct and explicit lyrics of the Petrarchan style to the dense and adroitly executed craft of the Tudor poets.

The highly complex referential structure of the poem is amply buttressed by a form of skillful artifice that is decidedly visual and emblematic in nature and yet which do not interfere with the poem's surface of inferences. In appropriating and recreating the narrative of emblems in his own style, Wyatt opens up a narrative space for self-referentiality and artifice. Wyatt's poem represents a sustained effort to employ artifice, and it is through artifice that it subverts and transforms the world of Petrarchan love lyric to make it his own.

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